

# Jumping Through Hoops

stories from British Columbians  
with disabilities accessing  
government programs and services



A BC HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION REPORT

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**Mary-Woo Sims**  
Chief Commissioner  
BC Human Rights Commission



June 2000

To: The Honourable Andrew Petter  
Attorney General and  
Minister Responsible for Human Rights

In the past 20 years, British Columbia has certainly seen many improvements in making programs and services more accessible to people with disabilities. Despite these advances, however, people with disabilities continue to face barriers in accessing public services, including government programs specifically designed for them. The Human Rights Commission hears about the problems and obstacles, both in our ongoing contact with people with disabilities and their advocates and through complaints filed with the Commission.

One issue that repeatedly arises concerns the existing system that requires people with disabilities to submit a separate application and substantiate their disability for each individual government program. The community believes that the system is overwhelming, costly, bureaucratic, and even inaccessible to many of the people for whom the programs are intended. Many have suggested that the system needs to be re-examined to better serve people with disabilities and have suggested alternatives, such as a single application process covering all programs.

Section 6(1) of the Human Rights Code permits the Commission to conduct or engage research into matters relevant to the Code. Earlier this year, the Commission undertook to research and document the views of people with

disabilities on the current application process for government programs and services. In particular, we wanted to document the stories of specific individuals and their experiences under the existing system. The report, **Jumping Through Hoops: Stories From British Columbians With Disabilities Accessing Government Programs and Services**, is the result of this research. It includes recommendations for improving the system, which are listed on page 14.

The Commission is hopeful that you and the government will take this opportunity to listen to the experiences of people with disabilities and endeavour to improve the accessibility of the system.

Sincerely,

Mary-Woo Sims  
Chief Commissioner

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## Acknowledgements

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The Commission would like to thank the people with disabilities and disability advocates around the province who generously contributed their time and experience for this report.

### Report production

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Spring 2000

# Introduction

In the 1998/99 fiscal year, the highest percentage of complaints (20.3%) received by the BC Human Rights Commission (BCHRC) was related to physical disability. The BCHRC was very concerned about this trend and met with key community organizations representing people with disabilities to identify strategies to combat the discrimination being experienced by the disability community. One suggested strategy was a news conference to bring public attention to the prevalence of discrimination that people with disabilities face; another was community consultation on disability issues.

Both events were held September 22, 1999, sponsored by the BCHRC in partnership with the BC Coalition of People with Disabilities, BC Association for Community Living, BC Paraplegic Association and BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society.

Among other concerns, participants at the consultation raised the issue of disability benefits and discounts, and the need to apply individually for each program. The associated costs, as well as the apparent lack of coordination among ministries and agencies, were identified as areas for future action. This report is part of the Commission's follow up to these concerns.

Disability discount and benefit programs are available through the provincial government, municipalities and local agencies. These programs range from gas tax rebates to home owner's grants to discounts for attendants when using some transportation carriers. Some programs are formally administered—the home owner's grant, for example, is governed by legislation—while others are more casual, such as some rural recreation centres which offer on-the-spot discounts to patrons who use wheelchairs.

However, each of these programs, which can offer significant cost savings for people with disabilities, has its own application process and requirements. For a person with a disability who wants to apply to four programs, for example, four separate applications are needed, with letters providing medical information specific to each program's eligibility criteria. Since doctors generally charge for

*It's hard for people who are not feeling well to have to keep applying for programs. If you have MS, for example, you can have bad periods when you feel terrible and it's hard to go out and organize things like these applications.*

*Lynn McBryan  
Multiple  
sclerosis  
North Vancouver, BC*

letters or forms, applications can be a financial burden for people already on low income. Also, it takes considerable time to prepare multiple applications, including trips to doctors and program offices, and completion of forms. However, most problematic is the distressing requirement to "prove" a disability over and over again in order to be eligible for programs.

Participants at the September consultation identified a possible alternative: a simple one-stop system whereby people with disabilities could certify their disability once and thereafter have access to any and all disability discounts in the province. This is a proposal that has also been put forward by a number of individuals and advocacy groups in recent years. It is this universal application concept that the BCHRC wished to explore and document through commissioning this report. Specifically, this report documents:

- background on the work done on a universal eligibility process,
- an overview of the discount and benefit programs,
- a summary of concerns, expressed by the individuals consulted in the preparation of this report, about the current multiple-application system and the proposed universal system,
- a summary of the recommendations that came out of discussions with participants and disability advocates, and
- an anthology of stories of people with disabilities who have experience accessing the various discounts and benefits in BC.

# Background

The concept of a universal application or a universal disability identification card has existed in the disability community for at least a decade. Most disability organizations are familiar with people's complaints with the existing application system, and two groups in particular, the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) and BC Coalition of People with Disabilities (BCCPD), have devoted considerable effort to investigating the issue.

The debate around a universal application process generally divides in this way: service organizations tend to support the idea whereas advocacy groups have mitigating concerns. Service groups want their clients to have easier, less expensive access to discounts and services, while advocacy groups have concerns around privacy and/or the advancement of disability awareness. The summary below of BCCPD's work expands on this advocacy group's perspective.

This divide was evident in this report's interviews as well. The majority of people with disabilities feel that they are entitled to cost savings because having a disability usually goes along with less income, less access and less opportunity—even though great strides have been made in recent years. These people feel they should not be scrutinized and made to "jump through hoops" for these discounts. Many feel that discounts should be open to all people with disabilities, not just people who have a narrowly-defined mobility impairment which is presently the case for most programs.

A few participants felt they were entitled to a discount only where a program didn't offer the same service to disabled and able-bodied clients. For example, a theatre discount is considered appropriate because a person using a wheelchair cannot sit wherever they want in the theatre. Another participant felt that the significant question is, "Why is a \$20 discount so important to people with disabilities?" In his words, it is important because there isn't a level playing field in employment, education or transportation. He felt that the resolution of these larger issues is the priority.

*If a universal system is put in place, there should be a booklet made available with clear details of the different programs. A lot of people find it hard to understand what's available to them. The information isn't clear enough.*

*Dave Schneider*

*Paraplegia*

*Vancouver, BC*

## Office for Disability Issues

The BC Office for Disability Issues (ODI) is an office of the provincial government created in 1995 which reviews policy and legislation affecting people with disabilities and recommends action across ministries. ODI also informs and educates public policy-makers and facilitates public involvement on disability issues. The group has a cross-disability focus and provides expert disability advice to all levels of government.

ODI undertook an in-depth project on a universal application in 1996-97. The Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, Recreation Branch had recommended that people with disabilities be given a single access card that would provide access to recreation programs. This concept was also identified as a priority at that time by recreation focus groups.

ODI invited various government representatives to discuss the possibilities of a unified approach to government disability discounts and benefits. The project team consisted of representatives from:

- Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture (Recreation)
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs (Additional Home Owners Grant)
- BC Ferries (BC Disability Ferry Card)
- Department of Fisheries (Non-Tidal Fishing License)
- BC Parks (Access Card)
- Environment Lands and Parks' Wildlife Branch (Special Hunting [from a Vehicle] Permit)
- Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations (Motor Fuel Tax Rebate)

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As the discussions developed, it became clear that the project team appreciated the benefits of a more simplified or centralized process, including possible cost savings to government through streamlined administration. The team also understood how such a system would serve people with disabilities,

through cutting costs for doctors' letters, reducing the time spent on multiple applications and, particularly, avoiding the need to repeatedly explain or legitimize their disability. There were, however, a few substantial stumbling blocks.

First, there was the question of how a centralized system would work and where it would be housed. Some programs were concerned that a universal program would homogenize the process to the extent that the original goal of each individual program would be lost. For example, some programs are geared specifically to people with a mobility impairment, not people with disabilities in general. Other programs governed by legislation have very specific eligibility criteria. Would it be possible to tailor a single application to these diverse needs? The representatives said that most of the programs were not intended as social programs to support people with disabilities who have low income. The purpose was merely to make programs equally accessible to people with disabilities.

Second, the project team was concerned about privacy of information. With the centralization of people's medical and personal information, what kind of protection would be needed—and possible—to ensure there were no unauthorized uses of this information?

Third, it was agreed that any such program would have to be voluntary for clients with disabilities. Therefore, each program would have to maintain an application process for those who wanted to apply to an individual program. Would this become too complicated and/or would this cancel any potential cost savings accrued from centralization?

As part of its follow up to the discussions, ODI developed a draft universal application (see appendix). The application lists the available programs and has two main sections: one for the applicant and one for the applicant's doctor. There are sections where the medical criteria for specific programs can be entered if the person wishes to apply for that program.

The forms' data would be stored in a central database where the information could be accessed by the benefit programs. Alternatively, a multiple-copy form

*The most important responsibilities government has toward people with disabilities is respect and to create accessibility for all disabilities. Don't do anything automatically! A person with a disability is a person and must be involved in decisions that affects their lives.*  
**Colleen Melville**  
*Meningitis, brain injury, epilepsy*  
*Victoria, BC*

*I'd like to see a disability ID card so people with disabilities could go from one community to another. It would have your picture on it so you could access programs anywhere. It would also be good for emergencies to alert response workers to your disability.*

*Yvonne  
Traumatic brain injury  
Terrace, BC  
last name withheld by request*

could be designed which the applicant would use to send a copy to each program.

ODI's work in this arena remains in the draft stage—on hold until the concerns raised by the project team are resolved. The Office continues to be interested in putting its resources behind a universal application that would benefit people with disabilities.

## BC Coalition of People with Disabilities

The BC Coalition of People with Disabilities (BCCPD) is a provincial cross-disability organization representing groups and individuals with disabilities. BCCPD's activities include lobbying government to improve policies which affect the disability community, promoting public awareness, serving on government panels and committees, and sharing information and self-help skills with individuals and disability organizations.

The BCCPD has examined the issue of universal access at the request of some members, though the issue has been framed in terms of a universal disability identification card. In the BCCPD's case, the issue has been revisited periodically for more than 13 years with no consensus being found. An impasse repeatedly arises between two points of view.

The first view is that people with disabilities continue to experience some degree of discrimination, reduced income and reduced access to services. A universal identification card would be an acknowledgement of these realities and would qualify a person with a disability for any and all discount programs provided within a given provincial jurisdiction.

The second view suggests that such a card would stigmatize people with disabilities—that people who have a disability are not necessarily poorer or in need of special services. Some people see a special card as a step backward toward segregation, rather than toward integration and equal treatment. The possible cost savings are not seen as an adequate compensation for the loss of ground in terms of public awareness and acceptance.

The issue arose at a September 1999 Board of Directors meeting and is again under discussion. As privacy of information is one of the BCCPD's larger concerns, the organization has written to the Senate urging it to pass Bill C-6 which will improve privacy protections. There are examples in Canada, and in the US, of private information being accessed by unauthorized users to deny insurance or other services to people with medical conditions.

At the time of writing, the BCCPD considers the relative merits of a universal identification card an unresolved issue.

# Program overview

Most of the discounts listed below have slightly different eligibility criteria—having a disability will not automatically qualify everyone for each benefit. Some programs are designed for people with a mobility limitation which would make it difficult for them to use the service without assistance. A person who is deaf or hard of hearing, for example, might not qualify for some benefits.

*So much time for disabled people is spent just getting through the day. The time and energy it takes to find different forms and letters is exhausting.*

**Alex Gilchrist**  
**Traumatic brain injury**  
**Victoria, BC**

The most widely-used programs are:

- Disability Parking Permit Program
- Annual Bus Pass
- Federal Disability Tax Credit
- Community Centre Recreation Passes and Discounts
- Fishing and Hunting License Discount
- BC Disability Ferry Card
- Additional Home Owner Grant for People with Disabilities
- Special hunting (from a vehicle) permit
- Provincial Motor Fuel Tax Rebate and Federal Gasoline Tax Refund
- BC Transit's handyDART and handyPASS programs
- BC Parks Access Card - Provincial Park Campgrounds

People with disabilities who receive provincial Disability Benefits Level II (DBII) automatically qualify for some of these programs and can submit proof of their disability status in lieu of medical certification. However, applicants are still required to apply separately to each program.

However, not all people with a disability receive Level II benefits (or Level I) and therefore do not automatically qualify. These discounts may be just as needed by these people with disabilities, although it is more difficult for them to qualify.

# Summary of concerns

## Concerns about the existing system

The interview group identified very similar problems and frustrations with the current system, regardless of their disability. These concerns are summarized below.

- The amount of time needed to apply, to obtain medical certification, complete forms and make trips to program offices was seen as onerous and discriminatory.
- Many of the people interviewed used words such as "demeaning" and "draining" to describe the need to repeatedly explain and document their disability.
- People who have **permanent** disabilities were frustrated by the need to reapply for benefits when their disabilities do not change.
- The costs of multiple applications can be very high: one person's doctor charged \$50 for a letter, though most doctors' fees were closer to \$20 per letter.
- A significant number of participants said they were unaware of the discounts available to people with disabilities.
- For people who did not have mobility impairments, there were complaints about the narrow eligibility criteria. For example, people who have cognitive disabilities may not be eligible for certain programs or people with brain injuries who require assistance may not qualify, even though they need an attendant to travel safely.
- Some participants described the intrusiveness of the process. People felt their right to privacy was not acknowledged, that program personnel act as if they have an unlimited right to people with disabilities' personal or medical information.

*I'm not aware of anywhere else that a universal application has been implemented. Before any steps are made in this direction, I think the government should look to see if any other jurisdictions have used it. And, if so, how well is it working?*

**Vince Miele**  
**Paraplegia**  
**Vancouver, BC**

- Participants also commented on how the application system can inherently discriminate against some of the people who need it most. In other words, the disability benefits system itself creates access barriers for people with certain disabilities. For example, people with disabilities which decrease energy or cognitive functioning can find it extremely difficult to work their way through one application, let alone many applications, and the associated bureaucracy. People who would likely qualify are therefore excluded because they cannot meet the administrative requirements of the system.
- It is difficult for some people to understand the different definitions of disability used by different programs. As a result, people sometimes cannot give doctors clear information on what information is necessary to demonstrate eligibility. Because of this confusion, some people do not apply and others' applications are refused.

## Concerns about a universal system

- Privacy is by far the main concern raised by participants and advocates. Darrell Evans, Executive Director of the BC Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, said that once personal information is stored on a card with a magnetic strip, for example, the potential for abuse exists.

People with disabilities already experience a high level of intrusion into their lives. Those who apply for Disability Benefits or for home care hours have the most private aspects of their lives exposed and scrutinized. They are understandably wary that information they volunteer for a universal system may not be safe from other uses which government or private agencies might develop in the future. Strategies and policies would be needed to safeguard information.

- People were also concerned about the present narrow eligibility criteria and hoped that a universal system would broaden the availability of programs, not restrict them further.
- Several people with brain injuries were interviewed in the preparation of this report. It is notoriously difficult for this group to access benefits and services because of the elusive effects of brain injury. People with brain injuries, and their advocates, hope to see greater recognition and accommodation of people with these often subtle, but devastating, injuries. People with other "invisible" disabilities, such as developmental disabilities or mental illness, experience similar exclusion because of stigma or lack of awareness around their disabilities, even though they may need a similar level of assistance or support.

# Recommendations

*I think government should look at people with disabilities' overall income and see why these \$10 fees are so onerous for a lot of us. That's where we need change: on the big barriers like employment and transportation, not the little ones.*

**Glen Cave  
Quadriplegia  
Vernon, BC**

- Government should continue to pursue the universal application concept. This was identified as a priority by a majority of those interviewed. Privacy concerns, which were foremost in many people's minds, would need to be thoughtfully addressed.
- If a universal form is implemented, participants favored a checklist-type format, where each applicant can check off all of the programs for which they wish to apply. Either a central agency, or the applicant themselves, could then distribute copies of the application to the respective programs.
- An "800" number should be established for people with visual impairments and other disabilities that make the application process particularly difficult. Clearinghouse representatives would record information for a universal form and circulate it as per the caller's needs.
- Government should create an information booklet listing disability programs and benefits for distribution to people with disabilities. A web site with this information is also recommended. Government should take a proactive responsibility to disseminate this information.
- Government, community and private agencies offering disability benefits and discounts should require people with a permanent disability to apply only once for any program. In other words, once a universal application was made, renewals would not be necessary. At the same time, people with disabilities want to leave the door open to a person with a severe, but temporary, condition to access discounts for the duration of their condition.

- Certain diagnoses—such as quadriplegia—should be accepted as adequate information to establish eligibility for a disability benefit or discount. The ways in which daily living tasks are affected should not have to be detailed.
- Program administrators should review their eligibility criteria for simplification or standardization with other programs. This is in response to questions raised about program criteria: are the criteria relevant or are programs asking for more information than they need?
- Some people recommended that a disability designation be incorporated into a BC Driver's License, BC Identification Card or BC CareCard. Government should undertake a review of this proposal. A government card of this kind could be used as verification for any discount program and could gain acceptance across other provinces to increase mobility and portability. Certification would be established either through proof of Disability Benefits II status, CPP Disability Pension status or a medical letter.

# Anthology

The BCHRC commissioned this report to summarize people with disabilities' concerns and to provide a "human face" to these issues. Over 30 disability groups and disability advocates around the province were contacted to provide input on the general issues of concern and to suggest participants who might want to share their personal experiences. The goal was to profile the experiences of people with disabilities as they attempt to access disability benefits and discounts and to ask: What are the kinds of obstacles you encounter? What are the costs of applying for these programs? What are the frustrations? What would make the system more efficient and more fair for people who have disabilities?

Over 25 people with a range of disabilities were interviewed about their individual experiences, with many of the same concerns arising repeatedly. Each participant provided invaluable background, and 14 of their stories appear in this report.

Since tape transcriptions of interviews were not possible, we have taken the occasional liberty of paraphrasing participants' stories. We are confident that what appears in this report is an accurate reflection of participants' views and comments. In the report's margins are quotes from participants whose stories appear in this report, as well as quotes from other participants.

We are grateful to everyone who took part in this research, through interviews, background and referrals.

## Sam Rizvi

Polio  
Vancouver, BC

Sam Rizvi has been a disability advocate for many years, working with various groups around BC. He has participated in task forces on rehabilitation, anti-poverty and employment. He moved from Alberta over 10 years ago seeking BC's milder climate and more accessible environment, and now lives in Vancouver with his wife, Naji. Sam is a Muslim who considers his religion his "soul food."

Over the years, Sam has applied for most disability programs, including the Disability Parking Permit, BC Disability Ferry Card, BC Parks Access Card, Additional Homeowner's Grant for people with Disabilities and the Provincial Motor Fuel Tax Rebate.

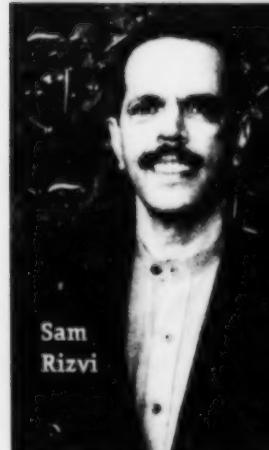
"In my opinion," Sam said, "the system is quite flawed. With these applications, you are usually dealing with a person who has no knowledge of disability issues. You have to open up your whole life for each small discount and it's very personal information. It's like stripping yourself in front of a stranger. It makes me feel a bit 'alien', like 'you're not one of us'."

Like other participants, Sam wondered why, with a permanent disability, programs need ongoing information to process his applications.

Sam estimates he's spent about \$350 on disability-related applications over the years. "And I can't even guess how much of my time it's taken," he said. "The programs say you can mail in the application, but that hasn't been my experience. For one reason or another, you have to go to the office."

The duplication of work and effort is an ongoing frustration to Sam, but he holds "nothing against the people who are administering these programs; their hands are tied because of the policies."

**To be honest, I have fewer obstacles in my path from being a person of colour. People can see my skin, but they don't accept my disability.** Sam Rizvi



Sam likens a universal application process to having a credit card: just as you don't have to establish your credit each time you want to buy something, you shouldn't have to establish your disability for each discount.

"A universal process would mean I'd only have to give my information once—and that information would be protected. It would stop this nightmare of having to apply over and over. And it would help our peace of mind; we'd be able to get on with our lives and use our energy for more productive things."

Regarding people with disabilities, Sam said he doubted there is "any other group of people that has to undergo this kind of scrutiny. To be honest, I have fewer obstacles in my path from being a person of colour. People can see my skin, but they don't accept my disability."

Privacy concerns were foremost on Sam's mind when envisioning a universal system. "If my information was shared with medical or genetics companies, I would be very worried."

If he had the opportunity to speak to government on this issue, Sam would say that, "It would be cost-effective. It would remove service duplication. People with disabilities would appreciate the government's good will and commitment to solving this problem. It's a win-win situation, I think."

Through his work in the disability community, Sam is aware of all the groundwork that has already been done on this issue. "Just do it. The information is all there and the benefits are clear. We need some leadership on this. It really is not a difficult thing we are asking for."

Just prior to his interview, Sam received a renewal notice from the Disability Parking Permit program. He called the office and found that, even though he was in the database as a person with a permanent disability, he was required to fill in a new application and provide a new doctor's letter. The office worker agreed to look into his case and call back. Sam is still waiting to hear if he will have to reapply.

## Lynne Meredith

Multiple sclerosis  
Age 56  
Vancouver, BC

Lynne Meredith's father was in the air force and her family was often relocated from place to place around the country. They finally landed in BC in 1952 and stayed. Lynne is an active volunteer, working with the Social Action Committee at the MS Society and the Committee to Promote Accessible Conventional Transit. She also enjoys seeing movies and plays. She has had MS for 25 years and now uses a wheelchair.

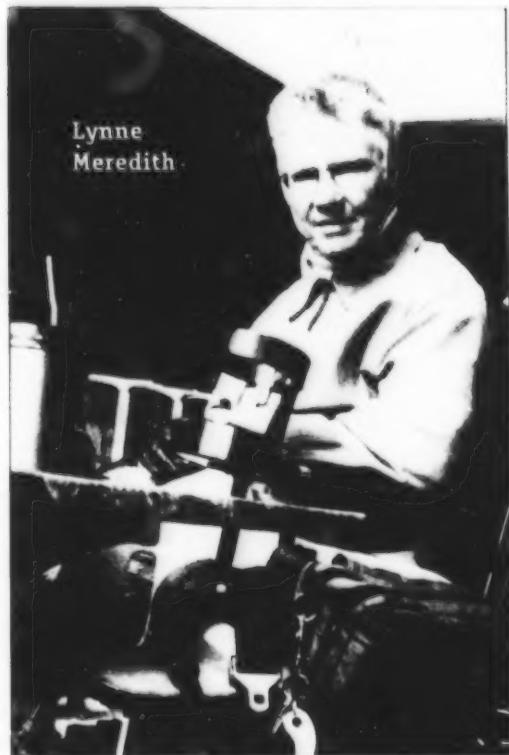
In general, Lynne thinks that BC's accessibility is something to be thankful for. "Compared to the rest of Canada, BC is very accessible. We're light-years ahead of Ontario, for example. Toronto is extremely hard to get around in if you have a disability."

Lynne has applied for disability programs such as the Additional Home Owner Grant for People with Disabilities, the BC Disability Ferry Card and the Disability Parking Permit Program.

"It is a frustrating process," Lynne said. "All the programs ask the same questions, about what your disability is and how long it is likely to last." Lynne is grateful she has a doctor who has not charged her for medical certification and who has never objected to filling out similar forms. "It's more a matter of my time. It's taken up a fair bit of my time over the years."

It may be that different applications are necessary because the programs are based on different criteria, Lynne said. However, she feels that some of the forms are unnecessarily detailed or the wording is hard to understand.

"The applications could be shorter and less difficult to fill out. Every time you need to get something from the provincial government, you have to jump through hoops to prove that you are disabled," Lynne says. "And it must cost the



*I think the different levels of government don't communicate with each other enough. And government doesn't take the responsibility to inform people with disabilities about the programs that are available to us.*

**Lynne Meredith**

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government a lot of money to make people go through these bureaucracies every time. Streamlining the process would have to save money."

Lynne presently receives a CPP Disability pension and is in the process of applying for provincial Disability Benefits. "The Disability Benefits process has been terrible really," says Lynne. "The form is very long and there is no service over the phone, so I have had to keep going down to the office."

When asked if a single universal application would work, Lynne replied that it could. "I think it's an excellent idea. It would be much less frustrating for people with disabilities and much less time-consuming. It would be less expensive for the government because doctors often charge the government for filling out forms."

"And," Lynne adds, "people may not understand how upsetting it is to have to keep justifying yourself, especially if you have a permanent or congenital disability. I have been in a wheelchair or scooter for years, but I still have to keep proving that I have a disability."

Other than possible territorial concerns among the different programs or agencies, Lynne doesn't see any disadvantages with a universal application concept. "I think the different levels of government don't communicate with each other enough. And government doesn't take the responsibility to inform people with disabilities about the programs that are available to us. My case manager, for example, told me about the individualized funding program. I don't think that many people with disabilities know about this program. Maybe the government doesn't want people to go on the program, but I don't think it costs the government more than the agency system and there are so many positive benefits for the client."

Lynne recounted a story of how some government workers can minimize their responsibility to advertise programs. "I was at an individualized funding workshop and a man from the Ministry of Health, I believe, was asked what his department does to inform people about the program. He replied that it tells everyone about it who asks! The government has a responsibility to advertise these programs, not just respond to questions from people who already know about them."



## Sharon Bridger

Multiple disabilities, including clinical depression and fibromyalgia

Age 51

Richmond, BC

Sharon Bridger moved to BC with her family over 30 years ago. She worked as an x-ray technician for 20 years and a dental assistant for 5 years. However, once she acquired her disabilities, she became unable to work. Sharon volunteered for five years as a facilitator with the Mood Disorders Association and she "gave presentations about

mental health disabilities to high school students about de-stigmatizing mental illness. I really liked doing it, it made me feel good." Cross-stitching, reading and doing puzzles are some of Sharon's current interests.

Sharon now receives DBII from the provincial government "They make you really fight for things," Sharon said. "The application forms for these programs have too many questions and they seem unfair. I'm on DBII, so I don't understand why my information can't just be looked up when I apply for things."

Because of her specific disabilities, Sharon feels worn down by seeing the same questions repeated on benefits questionnaires. "It's hard to go through all that when you are in bad shape. For example, I got a \$50 rebate through the Federal Disability Tax Credit. I put that down on my form for DBII, and I had to find the forms to prove that's where the money came from. It's so redundant to have to prove something like this. It made me really angry."

The financial cost of applications hasn't been an issue for Sharon; it is the frustration and time that concerns her more. "Because of my disability, I have very low energy and it's hard to have to run around. I'm on DBII for good reason—I have a severe disability."

*Because of my disability, I have very low energy and it's hard to have to run around. I'm on DBII for good reason—I have a severe disability.*

**Sharon Bridger**

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"I'm relatively high-functioning most of the time and I have a hard time with the system. It's sometimes overwhelming for me, but it must be much worse for people who don't function as well as I do."

The multiple applications also create more work for these programs. "There should be less redundancy. And, they should show you more respect and trust. You shouldn't have to go through everything 2 or 3 or more times."

Sharon is a supporter of the universal application proposal. She feels it would make things much easier for people who have a disability and the system would work more smoothly than it does now. "It would save us money and the government too. It would be much less stressful. Right now, the Ministry [of Social Development and Economic Security] makes you feel like it's not your right to have things, that it is doing you a favour."

## Barbara Toews

Bipolar disorder  
Prince George, BC

In her spare time, Barbara Toews enjoys karate, and her three cats and one dog. She also works for the Canadian Mental Health Association in Prince George as a consumer advocate and volunteer coordinator.

In Barbara's experience, most disability application processes are not designed with people with mental illness in mind. Eligibility for programs and discounts is most often based on physical function and/or the need for assistance.

"I often find myself checking the box marked 'other,'" said Barbara. "Because I have bipolar disorder, I don't fit the categories. I often have to look for room to explain my 'other' disability and how it affects me."

For people with mental illness, the application process can be extremely difficult and can even worsen the disability's symptoms. "In my particular case," said Barbara, "I spend a great deal of my time in hypomania—an accelerated state. My ability to concentrate on these applications can be really diminished."

And the repetitiveness of justifying my disability is disheartening. It was very difficult for me to accept that I had a disorder in the first place, like many people with psychiatric disabilities. There is so much stigma associated with mental illness and, when combined with the difficult time people have accepting these disabilities, the thought and the process of justifying my disability to others is absolutely horrific."

Barbara's experience is that misconceptions around mental illness are some of the hardest to change. "People think that those of us with mental illnesses are weak and we should just be able to 'snap out of it.' I felt that people could also be thinking this way when I applied for a discount or program. I was always worried about who I would have to deal with: were they someone I knew, would they talk about me after I left and would they understand why I was applying."

Barbara sees the value in a universal application, but feels an identification card might be a better option. "If you get Disability Benefits or CPP disability, that department could issue some kind of ID card so you don't have to reapply for every little program. If the government has recognized your disability, why isn't that enough?"

Barbara believes that government has a responsibility "to ensure that people with disabilities are treated with dignity and respect. I also believe that the government needs to take a harder line on its discrimination legislation and human rights legislation. This applies, in particular, to people with mental illnesses who are less likely to pursue any violations in these areas."

Although Barbara suspects it might be difficult for the various programs to agree on a common definition of disability, she feels a different approach might be considered. "Most of us haven't got much money so why should it matter which particular disability or loss of function we have? Why not just make any discount available to any person with a disability? It would be voluntary anyway,

**Because I have bipolar disorder, I don't fit the categories. I often have to look for room to explain my "other" disability and how it affects me.** Barbara Toews

so if a person didn't want to apply, they wouldn't." Barbara said she would still want this freedom to apply to just one discount if she chose, rather than going through a central application.

Like other participants, Barbara felt there might be privacy concerns if a central registry was established. She would want to know who would have access to her personal information.

"I would like the government to understand that most of us are on lower income and are disadvantaged in some way. Anything that allows people with disabilities to participate in their community more easily or more cheaply—those things are important to people."

Barbara said it would be a particular relief to people with mental illness if they had fewer dealings with bureaucratic processes. "There's still a huge stigma around mental illness. People can get to the point where they give up because it's too hard to keep justifying yourself. I'm there myself; I don't apply for anything any more. I just had an application for a leisure pass cross my desk, but the process is just too difficult."

Through her work with CMHA, Barbara knows that access issues and public awareness around mental illness have a long way to go. "I know this application process is an issue for my clients," Barbara said. "It would be great to see something improve."

## Dan Buss

Brain injury  
Comox, BC

Dan Buss' family has lived in BC since the 1890s and he now lives in Comox. He is very familiar with the idea of a universal application system through his organization, the Northern Vancouver Island Brain Trauma Society. The group has spent years lobbying for a single form that would be used by provincial and federal government departments. Project One Form, as it is called, has been reaching out to community groups as well as governments for support.

"We feel that disability benefits or discounts shouldn't come at a cost to the individual," Dan began. "Our idea was simple: those people who receive a Disability Benefits Level II or CPP

**We feel that disability benefits or discounts shouldn't come at a cost to the individual. Dan Buss**

Disability Pension have to provide a lot of information to register their disability. The status from either program could be coded-in BC-on their Care Card. The specific disability could also be printed on the card. The card would also be helpful in an emergency where the person isn't able to communicate what their disability is."

In his own experience, Dan has found that the questions to establish a disability are more difficult as the value of the applied-for benefit increases. "And it costs money," Dan said. "For the three discounts I've applied for, I've spent about \$125." Dan believes the financial benefit of a universal application to people with disabilities would be significant for them and doctors would not have to sort out how a person's disability fits the particular criteria of these different programs.

"Once a disability is established, it should be enough to qualify you for any program. It seems each application has its own set of guidelines," he said. Dan believes that people with brain traumas do not receive all the entitlements they deserve because of the difficult application processes. Special care would need

to be taken so that the application's medical standards would be able to accommodate all types of disabilities, not just physical impairments.

Dan suggests that each organization representing a particular disability could be asked "to develop an application and a list of needs associated with that disability." He would like groups who have the expertise to have input into an appropriate application process for the range of disabilities.

## Al Hanet

Glaucoma  
Age 63  
Kelowna, BC

*People with mental health or other types of hidden disabilities may be particularly concerned about [confidentiality]. I've heard of banks not giving mortgages to people because of information they've collected from other sources.*

**Al Hanet**

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Jumping  
Through  
Hoops

One of Al Hanet's passions is lawn bowling. He was the 1993 world class champion of lawn bowling for the sight impaired. He was also one of the two Canadians who participated in the Commonwealth Games lawn bowling championships in 1994 and the Olympics in Atlanta for the sight impaired.

Al has lived in Kelowna for almost all of his 63 years. Before being diagnosed with glaucoma in the 1970s, Al worked as a shipper-receiver and as a tugboat worker. Since that time, he thinks that BC's accessibility has progressed, though the general public's awareness could still be improved.

From the BC Parks Access Card to the Provincial Motor Fuel Tax Rebate to the Additional Home Owner Grant—Al has experienced the multiple application system. "The forms are all right, I don't find them too invasive or anything, but some of the questions are difficult to understand," said Al. "And it's cost me a few hundred dollars to get all the applications in. It works out to about \$25 for each one."

"I think one application form for all the programs would be a good idea," Al added. "But the information should be carefully protected. People would have to feel confident their private information will not be going into the public domain. People with mental health or other types of hidden disabilities may be particularly concerned about that. I've heard of banks not giving mortgages to people because of information they've collected from other sources."

At the moment, Al has about seven discount cards in his wallet. He would like to see one card that would entitle him to all the programs he presently qualifies for.

Al pointed out that changes in program criteria are sometimes made to restrict access. "Since the Additional Home Owner's Grant was changed, it's harder to qualify. The last time I applied, my doctor wouldn't sign the form because I'm not eligible any more."

Al currently receives CPP Disability pension and medical coverage from the provincial Ministry of Health. "I don't think the government does enough for people with disabilities. It should take more responsibility for helping people with disabilities lead fuller lives. I have to say, though, that I think the government does more than it used to. Recently, Human Resources Development Canada contacted me about a workshop on helping people with disabilities return to work. It's not going to help me much now because I'm virtually a senior. Still, I think it's a good step and, hopefully, it will help other younger people with disabilities to get back into the workplace."

Al also thinks that government should provide better funding for recreation. "This funding has been cut back which is very unfortunate. Recreational activities are very important to me and they help people who have a disability to lead richer lives."



## Linda McLarty

Brain injury, neck and back injury,  
diabetes  
Age 48  
Richmond, BC

Linda McLarty loves to write poems. She has written poems for the BC Brain Injury newsletter and for the Heart and Stroke Foundation. She also likes to find time for swimming and dancing. A few years after Linda and her husband moved to Salmon Arm, they moved to Vancouver and then to Richmond where she now lives.

Linda has multiple disabilities, including brain injury, an injured neck and back and diabetes. She has applied for some disability discounts, but found the Community Centre Recreation Pass and Discount to be the most unpleasant process.

"I had a very hard time getting the recreation pass," Linda said. "I went to my doctor for a letter, but the person I dealt with at the recreation office said it wasn't good enough. Apparently, it wasn't clear what my disability was. The worker had a bad attitude; I had to fight with him to get the pass. I almost gave up. It's embarrassing enough to have to apply for these programs without a worker's attitude making it even worse."

"Swimming is very good for me because it helps me relax. It helps my neck and back and that means I go for physical therapy less often. It saves government money in the end."

Because of the difficulties with the office worker, Linda needed a letter from another professional. "I got another letter from my mental health worker.



*Because of my brain injury, it's sometimes hard for me to remember everything. Instead of asking me what I need now—which would be easy to answer—they ask about how I was injured.*

**Linda McLarty**

Once I had that, I got the pass. But the whole experience of getting it was very demeaning."

In Linda's case, she often finds the application forms difficult because they focus too much on questions about the past. "Because of my brain injury, it's sometimes hard for me to remember everything," she said. "Instead of asking me what I need now—which would be easy to answer—they ask about how I was injured. I don't remember too well, so that can hurt my application." The redundancy of the application questions is also a frustration. "The process makes me very emotional. I'm tired of explaining about my disability and justifying my need for things."

A simplified universal process would be preferable. "It would be less denigrating for people with disabilities if we only had to answer these questions once," explained Linda. "There will always be some people who will abuse a system, but right now it feels like all people with disabilities are tarred with this same brush. We're made to feel we are abusing the system."

## Dave Symington

Quadriplegia  
Victoria, BC

Dave Symington has lived in BC off and on for about 16 years and it was here that he broke his neck in 1975. He now lives in Victoria which has pledged to become "the most accessible city in the world." Dave, and others, went to city council to talk about access needs and the council was so committed to disability access it made this pledge.

Apart from his job at Capilano College, Dave is involved in kickstART!, a disability art symposium planned for 2001, the Vancouver Adapted Music Society (VAMS) and the Disabled Sailing Association. Dave started getting back into music through VAMS and has since become a drummer for a mainstream band in Victoria.



Dave loves to travel to Hawaii when he can. His dream is to set up a bed and breakfast there as a respite destination for people with disabilities.

"Sometimes the application process is irrelevant or overly detailed," Dave began. "For some programs, you can't just give a diagnosis and prognosis—in my case quadriplegia. I have to provide all this information on how the disability impacts my abilities and functioning. 'Quadriplegia' should be enough information to decide if I qualify."

Dave said that Capilano College is looking at some related questions around service to students with disabilities. "It's a similar process we're going through. We're asking ourselves how much documentation is really needed to access our disability services. Like: does the student need specialized equipment or extra time for exams? Some people have more obvious disabilities than others, but at some point you may need to trust people about what their limitations are. We're also looking at different time limits for reapplying for different types of disabilities."

Like other participants, Dave objects most to the time he must spend navigating the application process.

He said he has had an application form sitting on his desk for weeks. "I just don't have time to do it. The Federal Gasoline Tax Refund is the worst. It's a really tedious task to go through all my receipts. I have to have someone help me sift through my records."

Because Dave works in Vancouver, he now has a doctor there. "My doctor in Victoria never charged me for support letters. In Vancouver, I find I'm getting charged every time—anywhere from \$10 to \$20."

Dave thinks that a universal system might be complicated to set up, but would be a great advantage in the long run. "I think people would be willing to

spend a bit more time on one longer application that would work for everything," he said. "The thing would be to get all the program administrators around the table to agree to it. Once you've accomplished that, you could have one card that would be good for the ferries, parks, etc."

Many people with disabilities don't know what programs they have access to, Dave said. "Maybe the form could be multiple choice, where you'd use your pencil and go through 50 questions or so, and then the computer would print out what you're eligible for. Then your information would be there and ready to go."

Dave said he could foresee a possible complication if a program changed its criteria or policy. "What would happen to me if I already had a card qualifying me for that program? Would I have to reapply?" There would also need to be some sort of training component for program personnel and/or a computer system set up if a magnetic card were part of the system.

"Maybe I'm different from some other people," Dave said. "I wonder about what the rationale for discounts is. Why should I get a benefit when I have a decent income? For BC Ferries, though, their system is not as accessible to me, so I deserve a discount. But for other services, a discount might not apply. I don't like the assumption that a person with a disability automatically needs discounts."

**I have to provide all this information on how the disability impacts my abilities and functioning. "Quadriplegia" should be enough information to decide if I qualify. Dave Symington**



Carrie Jensen

## Carrie Jensen

Age 53

Multiple disabilities, including chronic fatigue,  
Sjogren's Syndrome and lupus  
Salmon Arm, BC

Carrie Jensen said that, until she was forced into "early retirement" by disease, "I hadn't known I had any artistic talents—I found it very fulfilling." Carrie's main artistic outlet is mask-making. She began her craft in 1990, making masks out of fabrics and leather. In her healthier periods, Carrie sold masks through a local gift boutique, but now finds she only has energy to make masks for gifts.

When Carrie moved to BC in 1978, it was because she "longed for the mountains and good climate."

Carrie has no complaints, in general, about the types of questions asked on discount application forms. However, she "feels strongly that the cost of medical reports should be picked up by the province." In her case, she has paid a minimum of \$40 to have forms filled out by her physician, to a total of at least \$200. "My doctor is already filing reports for me with Revenue Canada, CPP and my private insurance. He won't do these forms unless he's paid."

"The way things are set up now, it's cumbersome, expensive, time-consuming for the disabled person and, creates more bureaucracy," Carrie continued, "not to mention the expense to taxpayers."

Carrie felt that it should be possible to combine all BC discounts, as well as federal discounts, under one roof, complete with an appeal system. "It would be tricky getting recognition outside the province, but it would be extremely beneficial for all disabled people if this could come together."

"There will always be individuals in any group who will try to take advantage of the taxpayer," Carrie cautioned. "It would be critical to have an appropriate medical certification of disability."

*It would be tricky  
getting recognition  
outside the province,  
but it would be  
extremely beneficial  
for all disabled  
people if this could  
come together*

*Carrie Jensen*

Carrie feels that government has a "moral obligation to the sick, the poor, the elderly, people with disabilities and children that should go far beyond their responsibility for individuals who can fend for themselves."

Since her disabilities have worsened, Carrie has had to give up her special interests—hiking, photography and writing. She's developed other pastimes, such as her mask-making, fighting for disability access and participating in on-line support groups. "And," Carrie adds, "I maintain my religious affiliation and involve myself as much as possible in the affairs of the community."

"In the last ten years, I have had to change my priorities to focus almost solely on myself in terms of how much or how little I can accomplish each day," she said. "I spent about 3 years struggling to accept what was happening to me. On the other hand, I've learned about meditation, prayer, having peace in my life and being happy. My 2 cats and my dog are my constant companions and give me great joy and love. In many ways, I am more free of burdens than I have ever been. The key to that has been acceptance, acknowledging my limitations and then doing something worthwhile with the capacities I do have."

## Tom McGregor

Age 38

Muscular dystrophy

Vancouver, BC

Tom McGregor was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy in 1994, but has experienced the effects of the disease since he was 16. Since that time, he has had to "rely increasingly on mobility aids."

As a disability advocate, Tom has the opportunity to observe the day-to-day difficulties of his clients. "A general observation I could make," Tom began, "is that the system needs to be flexible because managing a disability requires creative responses and solutions. But our current system is too rigid to allow that."



**Tom McGregor**

*A general observation I could make is that the system needs to be flexible because managing a disability requires creative responses and solutions. But our current system is too rigid to allow that.*

**Tom McGregor**

**34**

**Jumping  
Through  
Hoops**

Tom's personal applications have included the Additional Home Owner's Grant, the Federal Disability Tax Credit, Annual Bus Pass, handyDART and a Greyhound attendant pass. He found some of the questions on these applications inappropriate and limiting. "For example, the new Home Owner's Grant application asks if you have made costly modifications to the home. This makes it too difficult to get the grant. And, on the Greyhound Attendant form, you are asked if you need an attendant and if you need help going to the washroom. But if you need an attendant, you need an attendant. Why ask if I need help using the bathroom?"

Tom has not found that his applications have been expensive, but he has spent a lot of time on them. "I think it would be much better if there was a simpler system where only one type of verification is required," Tom said. "My concern, though, is that in the current social and economic climate the introduction of a single application model might result in a more restrictive, rather than a more liberal process—such as a narrow definition of disability which would make it harder to qualify. It could work to close the gate on some of the programs. I think that's a big risk that would need to be addressed before I'd really get behind the idea."

At his office, clients are often asking if there are benefits available to people with disabilities. "There should be a clearinghouse for the different programs. Then people with disabilities could take an application to their doctor and tick off what they need. As an advocate, that would make my job easier because there is no simple way for people to find out about all the programs. And there are too many different criteria for the different programs."

In addition to his job as a peer advocate, Tom is a mentor for the Community and Residents Mentors Association Project, and a board member with Pacific Transit Co-operative and his housing co-op. In his free time, Tom is a gardener and a skilled cook, and he enjoys reading, movies, swimming and the Internet.

"I'd like government to see that its responsibility is to provide holistic health care to people with disabilities," Tom concluded. "It should understand that its real role is to work toward removing the barriers to a level playing field, so that all Canadians have equal access to economic and social justice."

"Full participation for us should become the rule, not the exception," he said.

## Laurette Yelle

Cerebral palsy  
Vancouver, BC

Laurette Yelle has the kind of humour that people appreciate at meetings where discussions of disability issues can sometimes become heated or discouraging. She has often been known to lighten things up with ironic humour and her easy laugh.

Laurette has lived in BC all her life and has been involved with disability advocacy for many years, particularly with the Voice of the Cerebral Palsied of Greater Vancouver. Laurette lives in Vancouver with her husband, Yoshi, and enjoys travelling, camping, reading and going to the theatre.

When Laurette was asked about participating in this project, she understood immediately what the research was about and agreed some change was overdue. Laurette has applied for airline discounts, the BC Parks Access Card, Community Centre Recreation Passes and Discounts, BC Disability Ferry Card and Disability Benefits. She has also applied for a BC Driver's license which resulted, according to her, in an absurd moment. "The Motor Vehicle Office wanted me to get a letter from my doctor saying I could drive," Laurette laughed. "'What would my doctor know about my driving?', I asked. Why wouldn't it be up to the driving instructor to judge my driving skills?"

**If they aren't connected with the disability community, people have no idea what's out there for them.** Laurette Yelle

The application forms with which Laurette is familiar all require virtually the same information about the permanence of her disability and how it affects her "daily living." "Once you apply, you should be able to use that information wherever you go," Laurette said, "instead of going back and forth to your doctor like a yo-yo."

For Laurette, the worst thing is feeling her time is not respected. "When you book an appointment with your doctor to fill in these forms, you usually have to wait. There's that time wasted, plus filling in forms, plus transportation time." She also wondered how much doctors' time is spent on "filling out forms for all their disabled patients for all the programs. It's a gross waste of resources." Laurette's doctor has been accommodating, but has been frustrated with the needless bureaucracy since Laurette has a permanent disability.

"Well, it could all be simplified, couldn't it?" Laurette asked. "For people who have permanent disabilities, it should be simple to set something up. For temporary disabilities, there should be an expiry date on the person's file so they can get a parking pass for as long as they need it. I have no problem with that."

Laurette felt that "one very thorough application that would ask any questions any program would have" would work. "But," she added, "people have to be made aware of the different programs they qualify for. If they aren't connected with the disability community, people have no idea what's out there for them. These programs aren't advertised by government and that's too bad."

There wouldn't be any difficulty with a universal system, according to Laurette, except for privacy concerns that would need to be dealt with.

"I just think the government should advertise these programs better," Laurette adds, "and make them easier to access. If you don't want to make it possible for us to get these benefits, then why have the programs? I haven't applied for some discounts because it's too much hassle. I wonder if that's not what these programs are hoping for sometimes," Laurette said.

Laurette Yelle



## Peter Vancadsand

Age 38

Muscular dystrophy  
Smithers, BC

Peter has lived in Smithers all of his life, in part because he has a network of friends and neighbours who are "always there for me when I need them." He volunteers as a community fund manager with his local church which provides food money to low income people in the community when they are in a crisis situation. Peter loves fishing in the local rivers and lakes around Smithers. It was in 1993 that Peter was diagnosed with muscular dystrophy.

Peter has applied for the Federal Disability Tax Credit, the Home Owner's Grant, the Disability Parking Permit and the Federal Gasoline Tax Refund. As a rule, Peter feels that the process and the applications are fair enough given the programs for which he is applying. He said that he "never applies for something unless I feel that I absolutely have to and that I qualify for it 100%."

"However," he added, "it's the denial of your disability that seems really unfair. You are having your honesty questioned, that's really what it amounts to." For example, Peter was denied the CPP Disability pension—a decision which was overturned at appeal.

"I've found the whole application process can be a bit confusing," Peter said. "I've stopped applying for the Federal Gasoline Tax Refund because my wife has a home-based business, so she can claim part of the cost of gas. I could also claim part of this expense under the rebate, but it was a three-month ordeal trying to figure it out. I just stopped bothering with it." And, Peter added that he no longer qualifies under the Home Owner's Grant new application criteria. "It's really too bad because that bit of extra money really helped me and my family out."

Sometimes the disability discounts just don't make sense, according to Peter. "The Muscular Dystrophy Association invited me to Vancouver to attend a



*It's the denial of your disability that seems really unfair. You are having your honesty questioned, that's really what it amounts to.*

**Peter Vancadsand**

workshop. Revenue Canada would allow me to deduct the costs for my attendant, but not my costs. It's very hard to understand this kind of logic."

What does Peter think of a universal application system? "Well, I don't know of anyone who likes to fill out all these forms," he said. "The ministries should get together and figure out how all the information overlaps."

"And," Peter added, "I think it would make things easier if government made more effort to advertise what is available for people with disabilities. Most people don't know about these programs."

Peter felt that there would have to be some sort of updating process for people with disabilities whose conditions change over time. For permanent disabilities, there could be a separate designation, but for others "perhaps every 3-5 years would be reasonable. Every year would be too often."

"I think a central system would save time and be less stressful," Peter said. "People with disabilities are made to feel that their honesty is in question when they have to keep applying for everything. And, as I've said, denial is really hard to take, especially if you don't apply for something unless you absolutely need it."

Peter finished by saying that people with disabilities "didn't choose to become disabled. Canada doesn't owe me anything, but I am a proud Canadian and I believe our economy and our country are strong enough to provide assistance for every person who has a disability."

"My heart has always gone out to people with disabilities. I never thought it would happen to me. There are no guarantees in this life."



## Tom Bell

Age 24

Hydrocephalus, brain injury  
Victoria, BC

Tom Bell is a young man of 24 whose life was changed by an unusual accident: the end of a flicked towel injured his eye creating pressure on his brain. This accident led to his first brain surgery.

Since acquiring a brain injury, Tom must write down everything he needs to do in a day.

He can no longer play contact sports. He does, however, share his experience as a peer support person with the Vancouver Island Head Injury Society and he co-facilitates a group of people with head injuries.

Tom has applied for various disability discounts, including the Motor Fuel Tax Rebate, the Annual Bus Pass and Disability Benefits II. He said he has spent a lot of time "running back and forth" to fill out forms, gather letters and go to program offices.

"I had to have help answering the questions," Tom said. "I had to bring the forms to the Head Injury Society for help. Not everybody has access to help to fill out forms." He said that it was difficult for him to understand what some of the questions meant and, at times, "which form was which."

"I want it to take less time," added Tom. "I think they should have all the information about the person on the computer." Tom described the frustration of knowing that one program or department has his disability information, but it can't be given to another program. He explained that having a brain injury makes it very difficult to understand the difference between the forms and exactly what information is needed to apply. He finds it is a "waste of time to have to go around to everyone to prove that I have a disability."

In some cases, Tom also had to pay for medical letters. "My regular doctor would charge me, but my neurosurgeon wouldn't."

*I had to have help answering the questions. I had to bring the forms to the Head Injury Society for help. Not everybody has access to help to fill out forms.*

**Tom Bell**

Tom believes that a universal process would "make it easier to get things; it wouldn't be so confusing." He also thought a simpler process would save money for everyone.

"I think," Tom said, "that government should change the system to help people with brain injuries and other disabilities, too."

## John Higginbotham

Muscular dystrophy  
Age 54  
Courtenay, BC

John Higginbotham, who was born and raised in Vancouver, thinks that BC is a wonderful place in terms of accessibility. "I've been to the Yukon and Mexico and both are terrible for accessibility."

In his spare time, John likes to draw and paint, and spends a lot of time on his computer. He hopes to learn HTML coding and how to edit videotape.

John presently receives his income from a private insurance pension and from CPP Disability. He has applied for virtually every discount program that is available to people with disabilities. He also has a BC Driver's License for which he has to be re-tested each year.

"I have to do a driving test, written test, have my eyes tested and submit a medical report. I think being tested each year is too much—every five years would be much more reasonable."

When thinking about the forms he has filled out, John commented that he felt some of the questions were hard to answer and others were inappropriate. "For example," said John, "my disability is permanent, so questions about how long my disability is likely to last aren't relevant. I do understand they have to find out about your disability though."

"It is a pain having to keep applying for something like the Disability Parking Permit and to answer the same questions. Generally, all the programs ask similar questions."

As with many participants, John's biggest frustration is the amount of time he spends on seeking these benefits. "For a while, I lived a long way from my doctor who was in Duncan. So that was really inconvenient and cost me for gas, etc."

John feels that some kind of central registry would be a positive alternative. "I think it's a great idea. It could include a list of disabilities that would automatically qualify you for the programs. If you have that disability, you would only have to apply once. And it would be cheaper for everyone."

Though it might be easier for people to abuse this type of system, John didn't think this was a reason not to pursue it.

"Apart from the inconveniences and the energy you waste, it's psychologically damaging to have to keep saying 'I'm never going to get better.' It would be a relief not to have to do that."

**Apart from the inconveniences and the energy you waste, it's psychologically damaging to have to keep saying I'm never going to get better. It would be a relief not to have to do that.** John Higginbotham

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Jumping  
Through  
Hoops

# **Appendix**

**Office for Disability Issues:**

**British Columbia Universal Medical Certification  
for persons with disabilities.**

**Draft, for discussion only**



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**DRAFT**

***BRITISH COLUMBIA  
UNIVERSAL MEDICAL  
CERTIFICATION***

*for persons with disabilities*

***APPLICATION FORM***

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***BRITISH COLUMBIA***  
***UNIVERSAL MEDICAL CERTIFICATION***  
*for persons with disabilities*

<b>Purpose</b>	The UNIVERSAL MEDICAL CERTIFICATION for persons with disabilities is a reusable document to provide medical verification of permanent disability. Depending on the nature of your disability and its impact on your daily life, this document will provide all necessary medical information required by the following provincial programs serving persons with disabilities:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parking Permit for People with Disabilities</li><li>• Angling License Fee Reduction</li><li>• Permit - Disabled Hunter to Discharge a Firearm from a Motor Vehicle</li><li>• BC Ferries' Disabled Status Identification for Special Rates</li><li>• Fuel Tax Rebates</li><li>• BC Parks' Disabled Access Pass</li><li>• Additional Home Owner Grant for Persons with Disabilities</li><li>• BC Transit's HandiDART &amp; HandiPass programs</li></ul>
<b>Limitation</b>	This document is only meant to provide the medical information required when you are applying to any of the provincial programs listed above. You will still be required to prove your qualification against the non-medical eligibility criteria of each program.
	<p>Other provincial government programs (as well as municipalities, non-profit organizations, private companies, etc.) are NOT required to accept this document as proof of disability for eligibility under their programs serving persons with disabilities.</p> <p style="text-align:center"><del>DRAFT</del></p>
<b>Who should apply?</b>	All persons who are residents of British Columbia and who have permanent disabilities may apply. The permanent nature of the disability must be medically determined, often based on its anticipated duration or the probability of its reoccurrence within a specific span of time.
<b>How to apply</b>	The applicant or his/her guardian is to complete and sign PART A of this application and have their family physician complete and sign PART B.
<b>What if you are a Disability Benefits Level II recipient?</b>	If you receive Disability Benefits (Level II) from the Provincial Government, many of the programs listed above will accept receipt of Disability Benefits (Level II) as proof of disability. To verify this, you should obtain a "Release of Information" letter from your financial assistance worker at their district office and enclose it with your application. (Please note a cheque stub is not sufficient.) Certification from a physician (PART B) is not required.
<b>Role of Physician</b>	The physician completing this application must review the supporting documents and consider the intent of each of the programs listed above before completing each section.
<b>How to use this certificate</b>	Once complete, a <u>copy</u> of the Universal Medical Certification may be sent along with the standard application for any program listed above. DO NOT SEND THE ORIGINAL Universal Medical Certification as this to be retained by you in your personal records throughout the five year period that it remains valid.

# **BRITISH COLUMBIA**

## **UNIVERSAL MEDICAL CERTIFICATION**

*for persons with disabilities*

### **GENERAL INFORMATION FOR THE APPLICANT**

This application is for British Columbia residents only and when completed will provide all required medical registration to the following provincial programs for people with disabilities:

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Parking Permit for People with Disabilities                  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Angling Licence Fee Reduction  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Additional Home Owner Grant for Persons with Disabilities |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BC Ferries' Disabled Status Identification for Special Rates | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BC Parks' Disabled Access Pass                                       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fuel Tax Rebates  |
|  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Permit - Disabled Hunter to Discharge a Firearm from a Motor Vehicle | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> HandyDART & HandyPass                                     |

**IMPORTANT:** Please complete all sections below. This application does not guarantee eligibility to all programs. The detailed questions are required to satisfy the varying eligibility information requirements for each of the programs listed above. Specific information and eligibility criteria for each of these programs or services is provided in the back of this booklet.

### **PART A: PERSONAL INFORMATION (To be completed by Applicant or Guardian)**

Last Name:	First Name:	Birth date:	YY	MM	DD
/ /					
Address: Apt #:	Street:				
City:		Postal Code:	Telephone: ( )		

Describe your disability and how it impedes your ability to perform normal daily functions:

Do you require assistance to manage day-to-day living?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO
Do you receive Level II benefits under the Disability Benefits Program (formerly G.A.I.N. for Handicapped Benefits)?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/> NO

(If "YES", completion of PART B is not required provided you attach a Release of Information form from the Ministry of Human Resources that certifies you are a Disability Benefits Level II recipient.)

Do you receive any of the following:

- ICBC Handicapped Driver's Discount?  
 Registration with an institution for the sight, speech, or hearing impaired?  
 A 100% disability pension only through active service in any war while in Her Majesty's forces?

I hereby declare that the information provided above is accurate. I understand and acknowledge that medical information requested on Part B of this form is required to ensure that the eligibility criteria has been met for as many as possible of the programs or services listed above.

Signature Of Applicant (Or Guardian*)	Date	/	/
YY MM DD			
*If GUARDIAN signature above, please complete the next section:			
Last Name:	First Name:	Telephone:	
Address: Apt #:	Street:		
City:		Postal Code:	

**PART B: MEDICAL INFORMATION (To be completed by a Medical Doctor)**

How long have you known the applicant?

 First time visit     Regular patient

Date disability was diagnosed: YY    MM    DD

Medical name of applicant's disability:

The applicant's disability is:  physical     mental     sensory  
 which affects her/his:  mobility     agility     speech  
 hearing     sight     cognitive processing  
 other (describe below)

Is the disability permanent?

 YES     NO

Is the condition likely to continue for at least two years?

 YES     NO

If this is an episodic condition, is it likely to occur for at least one year and then reoccur?

 YES     NO

Is there any remedial therapy that would lessen the disability?

 YES     NO

As a result of this disability, does the applicant require:

1. extensive physical assistance in the home to perform normal daily activities?  YES     NO
2. supervision or assistance to manage personal affairs?  YES     NO
3. assistance to be mobile to the extent walking is difficult even with aids?  YES     NO
4. an attendant with him or her in order to travel?  YES     NO

**Medical Information: Specific to Additional Home Owner Grant Eligibility**

If "YES" to #1 above, what is the approximate monthly cost of physical assistance?

\$

Does the nature of the disability require costly modifications to the home?

 YES     NO

If "YES", describe these costly environmental modifications?

DRAFT  
Approximate cost of environmental modifications: \$

What is the nature of the applicant's relationship to the legal home owner?

 self     child     spouse     parent     sibling**Medical Information: Specific to Fuel Tax Rebate Eligibility**

What is the applicant's medical condition/disability? (Check one only)

- Loss of a limb     Permanent dependence upon a wheelchair     Complete, permanent functional loss of legs
- Suffers from permanent impairment of locomotion to the extent that the use of public transportation by them would be hazardous. Note: The availability of public transportation has no bearing on this qualification.
- Suffers from permanent sight impairment to the extent that the person would not be eligible to hold a driver's licence under the Motor Vehicle Act.
- Other - Explain

**Medical Information: Specific to Disabled Hunter Eligibility**

The applicant is permanently  disabled and cannot walk without the aid of an attendant, or  
 confined to a wheelchair for mobility, or  
 requiring the use of both arms and a mechanical device for mobility.

CERTIFICATION: By signature below the physician certifies he/she has read the eligibility criteria for the programs covered in this application and confirms the applicant meets these criteria to the extent identified.

Name of Medical Doctor:

Telephone: ( )

Fax: ( )

Address: Suite #: Street:

City: Postal Code:

Signature of Medical Doctor

BC Physician Licence No.

Date YY    MM    DD

/ /